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# Praxis Philosophy's 'Older Sister'

## The Reception of Critical Theory in the Former Yugoslavia

Marjan Ivković\*

Without any doubt, the former Yugoslavia was among the more fertile soils globally for the reception and flourishing of the tradition of Critical Theory over a span of several decades. Practically all major works by both the 'first'- and 'second-generation' critical theorists were translated into Serbo-Croatian in the 1970s and 1980s. Not only were there translations of the most influential studies of Critical Theory's history and theoretical legacy of that time (Martin Jay, Alfred Schmidt and Gian-Enrico Rusconi), there were also studies by local authors such as Simo Elaković's *Filozofija kao kritika društva* (*Philosophy as Critique of Society*) and Žarko Puhovski's *Um i društvenost* (*Reason and Sociality*). Contemporary Serbian political scientist Đorđe Pavićević remarks about Critical Theory in Yugoslavia that "this group of authors can perhaps be considered the most thoroughly covered area of scholarship within political theory and philosophy in terms of both translations and original works up to the early 1990s" (2011: 51). Yet, throughout socialist times, the broad and differentiated reception of Critical Theory never really crossed the threshold of a truly original appropriation, whether it be attempts to elaborate existing perspectives in Critical Theory, modify them in light of particular socio-historical circumstances of the local context, or apply them as a research framework for the empirical study of society.

The peculiarity of such a voluminous, yet theoretically restricted reception can only be properly understood if one bears in mind that the appearance of Critical Theory in Yugoslavia largely coincided with the only period in which this, otherwise academically peripheral region, had a presence on the global 'intellectual map' – the time of the Yugoslav 'Praxis School' of unorthodox Marxism, a current of thought that resonated to a great extent with the spirit and aims of Critical Theory, and thus inevitably assumed the role of its competitor within the global New Left. This in turn was reflected in the attitude of (parts of) Critical Theory itself – Adorno and Horkheimer never wrote a word about the Praxis School, even though they must have been aware of its existence. Other key authors, such as Habermas, Marcuse and Fromm, not only wrote about Praxis, they visited Yugoslavia on numerous occasions in the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1985, Slobodan Žunjić was already in a position to reflect on the peculiar nature of the Yugoslav reception of Critical Theory:

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“The history of the Yugoslav, especially Serbo-Croatian reception of the Frankfurt School could generally be defined as a history of a simultaneous cultural openness and intellectual resistance towards the stimuli that came from the Critical Theory of society. On the one hand, the sheer number of translations and references in one relatively small language, to which practically all important original (and reconstructive) works of the Frankfurt School have been translated, is impressive. On the other hand, however, this primarily cultural-historical presence of Critical Theory on the Yugoslav intellectual scene can hardly be said to have sparked some noticeable theoretical reaction, let alone a productive appropriation of the Frankfurt School’s accomplishments – this latter has so far been completely missing” (Žunjić 1985: 79).

Žunjić explains this lack of profound engagement with Critical Theory primarily as the result of Praxis philosophy’s reservations about, even rivalry toward, a more established and globally influential ‘competitor’. Thus, although special issues of locally influential academic journals such as *Theoria* and *Philosophical Investigations* (*Filozofska istraživanja*) were dedicated to Critical Theory, and prominent Yugoslav philosophers such as Gajo Petrović and Milan Kangrga reflected on the intricacies of the critical-theoretic project, reflection too often assumed the form of an implicit weighing up of the relative advantages of Praxis philosophy with respect to Critical Theory, even after the former had ceased to exist as a project in the mid-1970s. Paradoxically, as I will briefly illustrate in the conclusion, only in recent years have we witnessed some truly original appropriation of key figures and themes in Critical Theory in the region of former Yugoslavia, long after the ‘golden era’ of Yugoslav unorthodox leftist thought.

Yet despite the rivalry and theoretical restraint displayed by members of the Praxis group, the presence of Critical Theory in Yugoslavia at the height of this group’s influence was indeed impressive. The at the time well-known *Korčula Summer School*, organized by the Praxis group between 1963 and 1974, saw not only the participation of Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Jürgen Habermas, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, but more generally of such influential Neo-Marxist thinkers as Lucien Goldmann, Ernst Bloch, Agnes Heller, Leszek Kolakowski and Karel Kosík. After the School’s demise, in 1975 Jürgen Habermas founded the (by now famous in critical-theoretic circles) *Philosophy and Social Sciences Colloquium* at the Inter-University Center (IUC) in Dubrovnik, an annual conference envisaged as the successor to the Korčula School, but dominated from the start by Habermas’ ‘new paradigm’ of Critical Theory.<sup>1</sup> As Yugoslavia violently disintegrated in 1991 and its successor states descended into a decade of warfare and social unrest, the unique intellectual and societal ambience which provided the backdrop for the reception of Critical Theory also seemed to have disappeared without a trace. But as the region slowly emerged from the mayhem in 2000s, the interest in Critical Theory (of all ‘generations’) was reignited to some extent. So what were those unique circumstances that first sparked this long-lasting engagement with the tradition of Critical Theory in this volatile region?

1 The history of this annual conference has been somewhat of an adventure: founded in Dubrovnik in 1975, it convened for the last time in Yugoslavia in May 1991, literally as the city was being besieged. Since 1993 it convenes annually in Prague, and has celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

## 1. The political and intellectual context: Yugoslav self-management socialism and the Praxis School

The openness and receptivity of the Yugoslav academic scene for Critical Theory in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s might seem somewhat peculiar to an observer unfamiliar with the unique political context of post-war Yugoslavia which made this real-socialist society a welcoming terrain for 'non-dogmatic' strands of Marxism. The politically autochthonous socialist leadership of post-war Yugoslavia proved capable of breaking geopolitically with the Soviet-led socialist world in 1948, but the break was not underpinned by a genuine ideological disagreement – it was a strategic and 'realpolitik' move that required some *a posteriori* ideological justification. The latter came in the form of the ideology of 'self-management socialism', a new model of socialism laid out by its principal intellectual architect, the Slovenian Edvard Kardelj in 1950.

The term 'self-management' referred to the decentralization (less central planning) of the Yugoslav economic reproduction, and it denoted the political elites' new conviction that the entire social reality cannot and should not be 'planned' according to the vision of a desired (socialist) society through constant intervention on the macro- and micro-level. In Yugoslavia, the political and economic liberalization that the ideology of self-management brought was reflected in the (often exclusively nominal) devolution of political power to constituent republics and opening up of space for regulating some limited aspects of economic activity through the logic of the market. Another important aspect of 'liberalization' in Yugoslavia meant a somewhat higher threshold of tolerance by the political elites for challenges to its principles of legitimation, that is for 'criticism' coming from various dissident intellectual circles.

Such was the particular 'anti-dogmatic' political and economic context of Yugoslavia from which the intellectual current of the 'Praxis philosophy' or 'Praxis orientation' of humanist Marxism gradually emerged in the early 1960s, represented primarily by two groups of authors: one centred around the University of Zagreb (Gajo Petrović, Rudi Supek, Milan Kangrga, Predrag Vranicki, Danko Grlić, Ivan Kuvačić and Branko Bošnjak), the other around Belgrade University (Mihailo Marković, Ljubomir Tadić, Dragoljub Mićunović, Zagorka Golubović, Nebojša Popov, Miladin Živočić and Svetozar Stojanović). The Praxis school's origins are tied to the founding of the journal *Praxis* (published between 1964 and 1974) and the *Korčula Summer School* (active 1963–1974). Both the journal and the conference ceased to exist in a period of tightened censorship and repression of critique in the mid-1970s.

The Praxis school endorsed the general vision of Yugoslav 'self-management' socialism as truer to Marx' original vision and more humane than the Soviet variety, often echoing the official Yugoslav criticism of the latter as 'bureaucratized state capitalism'. Yet, from the outset the Praxis authors also aimed to identify and denounce what they saw as 'deviations', 'obstacles' and 'regressions' of the Yugoslav system that impeded the realization of a truly socialist society. Praxis philosophers insisted on reactualizing the 'philosophical' legacy of Marx' work as opposed to the dogmatic interpretation of Marxism as a 'science' characterized by the 'dialectical-materialist' method endorsed by the Second and Third International. The Yugoslav school's conceptualization of 'praxis' was grounded in the early Marx' philosophical anthropology laid out in the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, and it denoted the comprehensive human capacities for 'creative self-constitution', that is the 'production' of social reality through meaningful, non-alienated work as well as

non-instrumental forms of action (art, communication, theory). The ‘realization of human potentialities’ is a leitmotif for the Praxis school: Branko Bošnjak explains that “*Praxis* would be the realization of that which still isn’t, and which can be realized in virtue of its own foundation (hypokeimenon)” (Bošnjak 1964: 13). Gajo Petrović, on the other hand, uses the term ‘being’ to define Praxis, a characteristic that will induce Habermas to define the Praxis school as a variant of “Heideggerian Marxism” (Žunjić 1985): “Praxis is, among else, the universal, free, creative and self-creating being” (Petrović 1964: 22). The first volume of the journal Praxis opens with the introductory note by the editor (Petrović), in which he concisely defines the journal’s central aims, invoking Marx’ famous maxim of the ‘ruthless critique of everything existing’:

“We want a philosophical journal in that same sense in which philosophy is the thought of revolution: the ruthless critique of everything existing, a humanist vision of a truly human world and the inspiring force behind revolutionary action. The title Praxis was chosen because ‘praxis’, that central concept of Marx’ thought, expresses most adequately the above outlined conception of philosophy” (Petrović 1964: 4).

The ‘ruthless critique’ that Petrović advocates is the critique of the ‘alienated’ world of both the capitalist and real-socialist societies, a world in which the human capacity for ‘praxis’ in the above sense is systematically neutralized through multi-dimensional forms of domination (economic exploitation, fragmentation of work, bureaucratization, etc.). The label ‘Praxis orientation’ was for most members synonymous with ‘revolutionary thought’, as Praxis philosophers retained confidence in a true ‘Marxist revolution’ that would bring about a non-alienated world of human ‘self-constitution’.

## 2. Critical Theory and Praxis: Between Dialogue and ‘Friendly Fire’

Just how closely the vision of Praxis laid out by Petrović reflected, and resonated with, the early project of the Frankfurt School can be observed from Petrović’s manifesto which followed the above lines:

“The questions we wish to address transcend the limits of philosophy as a discipline. These are questions that bring together philosophy, science, art and societal action, questions that do not pertain to just one or another fragment of the human being, but human being as a whole. We will aim to gather collaborators in accordance with an orientation to problems which cannot be restricted to any particular discipline, including academic philosophy” (Petrović 1964: 4).

The resonance with Horkheimer’s program of the early 1930s is striking, yet this very resonance across a thirty-year distance is also the key reason for the two traditions’ complicated and uneasy relationship. Namely, by the early 1960s, Critical Theory, the ‘older sister’, had lived through three turbulent decades and evolved into a multi-faceted and internally differentiated tradition. Only some of its diverging sub-currents could still be considered in the 1960s as part of the same ‘revolutionary project’ as the emerging Praxis group in Yugoslavia. The ‘American wing’ of post-war Critical Theory, represented by Marcuse and Fromm, was one such sub-current, and, to a lesser extent, Jürgen Habermas’ perspective in Germany which distanced itself from Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s distrust of any emancipatory collective action. Marcuse definitely aroused the greatest interest in Yugoslavia at the time of Praxis, particularly after 1968. However, the Yugoslav reception of Marcuse’s “preserved revolutionary pathos and the power of anticipation” was, as Žunjić points out, “closer to

Lukacs' and Bloch's version of Western Marxism than to Horkheimer's and Adorno's classical conception of critique" (Žunjić 1985: 81).

The first major work of Critical Theory translated to Serbo-Croatian in 1963 was, somewhat surprisingly, Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason*, a study as far removed as possible from the Praxis revolutionary project. Horkheimer and Adorno, the 'core' of the post-war Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, could rather be seen as an implicit 'constitutive other' of Praxis. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was only translated in 1974 (Horkheimer/Adorno 1974), the year Praxis ceased to exist as an organized movement and translations of most of Adorno's and Horkheimer's central works appeared in the aftermath: *Traditional and Critical Theory* in 1975, and *Negative Dialectic* and *Aesthetic Theory* only in 1979 (Adorno 1979a, 1979b). The sentiment of rivalry and resistance of certain key Praxis members, whether only to the Frankfurt School's 'negativist' core or to the entire tradition persisted long after Praxis was suppressed. As late as 1985, Gajo Petrović, probably the harshest 'friendly' critic of the Frankfurt School, contends that

"It seems that the main reason for the lack of success of the Frankfurt School need not be looked for outside of the actual foundations of the project, that is, in the uncritical belief that what had historically evolved as 'Marxism' (and which is in fact a completely different form of thought) could still somehow be corrected, and further creatively elaborated [...] However, a much more important distinction, in my view, is the difference between 'Marxism' and Marx's actual thought" (Petrović 1985: 14).

For Petrović, 'Marxism' as the deformation of 'Marx's actual thought' includes not only the dogmatic dialectical materialism, but any attempt at either a 'scientific' or a philosophical elaboration of Marx' perspective, including Critical Theory: all such attempts inevitably 'petrify' the revolutionary anthropological potential of Marx, as another key Praxis member, Danko Grlić (1964), stresses.

From the outset, Jürgen Habermas seemed an exception to the rule of Praxis group's somewhat nonchalant dismissal of Critical Theory as a 'misunderstanding of Marx'. The real introduction of Critical Theory to the Yugoslav intellectual context was the 1963 German publication of Habermas' *Theory and Practice* (*Theorie und Praxis*), discussed in the third volume of the journal *Praxis* by Milan Kangrga, a core member of the Praxis group. Perhaps more than any other work in Critical Theory, Habermas' early study resonated with the central concerns of Praxis – however, this first contact also threw into contrast the key point of disagreement. Yugoslav authors were eager to stress that their conception of 'praxis' was 'ontologically grounded' and more comprehensive than Habermas' one. Milan Kangrga, the most 'speculatively-minded' member of the Praxis group according to Slobodan Žunjić, argued in his review of *Theory and Practice* that Habermas' "refusal to ontologize [praxis] leads him, however, to the other extreme, namely to that position from which he cannot see precisely the ontic dimension of the historicity of human praxis, through which it opens itself and enables precisely the historical shaping of the world of human self-preservation" (Kangrga 1965: 699).

Kangrga also polemicalizes, in his *Praksa, vrijeme, svijet* (*Practice, Time and World*) with Habermas' *Knowledge and Human Interests* (*Erkenntnis und Interesse*), translated in 1975. He criticizes the key conceptual distinction Habermas makes in this work that will serve as the foundation for the later theory of communicative action: the distinction between 'work' and 'interaction':

"Habermas' thought remains, in essence, within the horizon of the old distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*, and on that foundation it then builds its critique of Marx. The paradoxical nature of the critique lies in the fact that Habermas 'reproaches' Marx precisely for not respecting this distinction,

or, seen from another angle, he stresses the need to complement the concept of work with that of interaction" (Kangrga 1984: 56).

In Kangrga's view, the early Marx was capable of transcending the distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis* in his anthropology of humans as 'creative beings of praxis'. Without any doubt, Habermas' perspective was treated as a productive challenge to the Praxis project, and the discussion of his work displays, more than that of any other critical theorist, some elements of creative appropriation.

Even though Herbert Marcuse was at that time even more warmly welcomed in Yugoslavia than Habermas (both in person and theoretically) due to the revolutionary fervour of his thought, the reception of his work was also far from an uncritical endorsement. A good example might be Danilo Pejović's afterword to the 1965 translation of *Eros and Civilization* (Marcuse, 1965), the second important work of Critical Theory to be translated after the *Eclipse of Reason*. Pejović undertakes an acute Praxis-inspired critique of Marcuse's attempt to synthesize psychoanalysis and Marxist revolutionary thought (Pejović notes that Marcuse does not even mention Marx explicitly in the work):

"[Freud] remains a pessimist, and Marcuse wants to transform him into an optimist. But what about Marx? Against both types of Romanticist anxiety and pessimism [Freud's and Marcuse's] – *homo homini lupus* – he believes that human survival is also possible within a social order that follows the maxim: *homo homini socius* [...] Therefore, the Logos of such an act [of revolution] cannot be Eros but POIESIS, which includes Eros as a form of production of the human world, from the production of means of subsistence and bodily passion to the poet's vision of the universe" (Pejović, 1965: 238 f.).

Pejović's criticism clearly embodies the uneasiness of Praxis philosophers with signals of Adornian 'negativism' within Marcuse's perspective, couched within his standpoint in the language of psychoanalysis. The influence of this strand of Critical Theory in Yugoslavia culminated, of course, in the global student protests of 1968, with Belgrade as an important epicentre of protest in Europe and the only one in the socialist world. The Praxis school's critique of the Yugoslav regime converged with, and partly inspired, the June 1968 student protests in Belgrade, as both targeted the 'red bourgeoisie' of communist officials. The 1968 Korčula School testifies to that year's unparalleled interaction between Praxis and Critical Theory: the August sessions in Korčula saw the participation of Marcuse, Fromm, Sohn-Rethel and Habermas, alongside Ernst Bloch, Agnes Heller, Lucien Goldmann, Thomas Bottomore, Eugen Fink and a number of other prominent thinkers.

As elsewhere in Europe, North America and beyond, the events of 1968 were a catalyst for a more comprehensive reception of Critical Theory in Yugoslavia. While the 1960s saw translations of certain key works and isolated discussions of Habermas and Marcuse, one might say that the systematic reflection on Critical Theory as a whole begins with the 1970 translation of Gian-Enrico Rusconi's *Critical Theory of Society*<sup>2</sup>. A younger member of the Zagreb Praxis circle, Žarko Puhovski, emerged around that time as an insightful analyst of Critical Theory. Evident in his foreword to Rusconi is a generally sympathetic approach to the tradition, without the earlier Praxis' authors anguish of constant juxtaposition with their own project. Puhovski's positive interpretation of Critical Theory reads practically as the complete refutation of Gajo Petrović's earlier-quoted criticism:

2 In the 1960s one hardly finds the term 'Critical Theory' in Yugoslav literature – only the term 'Frankfurt School of Marxism'. The use of the label 'Critical Theory' in Yugoslavia in the aftermath of 1968 coincides with the global explosion in its use (see Pavičević 2011).

"Starting from the distinction between the essence and representation of society as a concept, and from all the phenomena that are immanent in it, that is, starting from the complete awareness of exactly that difference which Marx sees as the precondition of every science, the theorists of the Frankfurt School create the possibility of a completely new form of research. The critique they articulate always insists on the unity of philosophical theory and the practice of individual sciences, and it is founded upon the striving for the harmonization of knowledge and societal interests, all with the constant aim of human liberation in mind" (Puhovski 1970: XVI).

For Puhovski, the Frankfurt School project in its original shape does not 'petrify' Marx' thought, on the contrary: it, too, presents a revolutionary and productive attempt at actualizing Marx' most fundamental hopes. But even the 'negativist turn' of Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is no longer met with repudiation by the younger generation of commentators emerging from Praxis circles: Puhovski's then-wife and scholar of Critical Theory, Nadežda Čaćinović-Puhovski, formulates balanced critiques of both *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1974) and *Negative Dialectic* (1979). Čaćinović-Puhovski's interpretation of Adorno and Horkheimer's perspective is framed by Praxis, distrust' of 'science', but, in contrast to earlier interpretations, she endorses the two theorists' repudiation of classical-Marxist emancipatory hopes.

For Čaćinović-Puhovski, the value of Horkheimer's and Adorno's "understanding that the question of the relationship between nature and culture cannot be solved through categories of science", is "not in any way diminished" by the fact that Adorno and Horkheimer treat the "attempts to break the closed circle [of administered society] as blind activism, one that actually gives in to the logic of the enemy" (Čaćinović-Puhovski 1974: 284). She treats the two authors' unique perspective on the dialectical logic of the human objectification of the natural world as a viable alternative both to Marcuse's 'positively formulated' project of a new science and technology, and to Habermas' abandonment of the concept of nature in favour of the conceptual distinction of 'work' and 'interaction'. Čaćinović-Puhovski argues that Habermas finds himself in a paradoxical position, as he locates the emancipatory potential of linguistic 'interaction' in individuals socialized under 'specific circumstances' – circumstances that have effectively disappeared in contemporary capitalism according to Habermas' own perspective (Čaćinović-Puhovski 1974: 285 f.).

Čaćinović-Puhovski would further elaborate her refined understanding of the late Adorno's perspective in her analysis of *Negative Dialectic*. Including Adorno's work in the broader project of 're-philosophizing' Marx that also defined the Praxis school, she argues that "the discussion of whether there are enough, or too few, elements in this work for a diagnosis of late capitalism makes it impossible [...] to see Adorno's work in the context of the relationship of Marx and philosophy, of the inevitability or futility of the intention to re-philosophize Marx' thought" (Čaćinović-Puhovski 1979: 6 f.). In contrast to Gajo Petrović, her reception of Adorno's work sees it as capable of actualizing or elaborating precisely some of the most profound intuitions of Marx' thought within the contemporary context of the 'Enlightenment that has returned to myth', that is, to the barbarous world of fascism and the threat of nuclear destruction. Along the same lines of Praxis, sensitivity for the 'anthropological' implications of the late Adorno's epistemological reflections, Kasim Prohić comments on Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, translated in that same year (Adorno, 1979b):

"The aporetic nature of life and spirit has become the marker not only of writing, as a trait of 'signifying practice', but of the entire modern anthropological experience [...] And if there is a thinker today who has managed not only to transform this aporetic nature into a 'programme', but in whom this na-



ture is the very productive power of thought, a recognizable grapheme of internal categorial articulation and a 'style' of philosophical writing, that author is Theodor W. Adorno" (Prohić 1979: 9).

If one were to sum up the maturing of the Praxis-inspired reception of Critical Theory in Yugoslavia from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s and early 1980s, one could say that it evolved, from the mere juxtaposition of Praxis 'actualization' and Critical Theory's 'petrification' of Marx, to a much more refined understanding of the two currents' common concern with 'de-reifying' Marx' thought through theoretical innovation and distancing from all 'systemic' or 'programmatic' forms of thinking, whether about Marx' legacy or about social change and emancipation in general.

### 3. From Fragmentation to Resurrection: 1980s and the Present Day

By the mid-1980s, the constellation of political and societal factors that had defined the initial reception of Critical Theory in Yugoslavia changed considerably. The atmosphere of progressivism that gave birth to Praxis, a sense of trust in the socialist alternative and the bright, non-alienated future of humanity that characterized the 1960s and early 1970s, dissipated completely with the death of Tito and the prolonged economic stagnation and political sclerosis of the 1980s. Finally, in the second half of the 1980s, the resurgence of ethnic nationalisms in Yugoslavia seemed the negation of all that the humanist Marxists of Zagreb and Belgrade had stood for. More broadly, the global 'neoliberal revolution' that started in the late 1970s also put an end to any emancipatory hopes that lingered on for a while after exploding in 1968. In a certain sense, the situation in Yugoslavia in the 1980s was better attuned to Critical Theory's always weary analysis of modernity than the self-confident climate of the 1960s and 1970s.

But the prevailing atmosphere of stagnation and disillusionment was also unsuited to some newly inspired and creative appropriation of Critical Theory. Instead, it enabled a more tempered and distanced analysis, some of which treated this tradition of thought as if it had, just as Praxis, fulfilled its historical role (Puhovski 1989; Elaković 1984). Other commentators were more careful and optimistic. Risto Tubić, for example, reminds us in 1982 that

"It is indubitable that the historical moment of an exceptional generation of Marxists is gone forever, but the above conclusion is wrong; that circle, of course, is no longer what it used to be, its experiences are indeed unique; but leaving aside here the important characteristics of the split and the generational divide of that circle today – philosophers such as Habermas, Schmidt, Negt, Wellmer and those of the youngest generation, constantly confirm us in our view that the influence of the Frankfurt School will remain strong" (Tubić 1982: 488).

As we saw earlier, Habermas' work, more so than that of any other critical theorist, aroused genuine interest and inspired thoughtful criticisms in Yugoslavia already in the 1960s, due in part to the proximity of his perspective to Praxis, but also to his general intellectual curiosity and openness for dialogue. His later 'paradigm turn' in Critical Theory was thus also met with more understanding and encouragement than in other left-leaning academic environments of the day. Zdravko Kučinar formulates the most concise defense of Habermas against criticisms that he had 'abandoned' the Frankfurt School project, primarily by way of stressing Habermas' stout anti-positivism:

"The critical study of society or critical sociology, as Habermas sometimes incoherently defines his own standpoint, first of all has to reject the objectivism of the behavioural sciences. Instead of ob-

servation, on which these disciplines are founded, the critical-theoretic analysis follows the hermeneutic imperative of understanding the social communication of reflexive subjects. However, it simultaneously rejects the idealism of hermeneutics [...] which interprets complexes of meaning from the point of view of cultural tradition, instead of the relations that sustain that tradition" (Kučinar 1980: XIV).

In Kučinar's view, Habermas' then-evolving theory of communicative action remains true to Marx' treatment of social reality as incomplete, requiring the 'constant rearrangement of relations of societal life', in which human beings must treat each other not in light of what they are, but of what they are yet to become, that is, their potentiality. In everyday life, as Yugoslav political elite experimented with economic reforms to overcome the crisis, the 'constant rearrangement' of societal relations resulted above all in the disorientation of its citizenry, as well as its academia. While the 1980s witnessed the greatest number of references to Critical Theory, with analyses ranging from the remnants of Praxis critique such as Petrović's 1985 dismissal, enthusiastic reconstructions of Adorno (Puhovski, Čačinović-Puhovski), to 'sympathetic analyses of Habermas' emerging 'new paradigm' (Kučinar), the differentiation was not followed by greater originality or depth. The rise of Slobodan Milošević and the disintegration of the country starting in 1990 signalled the end of the meandering Yugoslav reflections on whether, and in what form, Critical Theory is 'still relevant for our times'.

The extent to which the reception of Critical Theory was interrupted by the disintegration of Yugoslavia might perhaps best be illustrated by one disturbing vignette. The translation of Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* that started in the late 1980s, was only completed this year, three decades later (*Teorija komunikativnog delanja*, Akademska knjiga, 2017). One of the three translators of the seminal work was Zoran Đinđić, also one of the youngest members of the Praxis group in its closing years and a student of Critical Theory who later collaborated with Habermas. Đinđić became a prominent Serbian opposition figure in the 1990s and then the first democratic, post-Milošević prime minister of Serbia in 2001, only to be assassinated in March 2003.

By now, not only Habermas, but even some 'third-generation' representatives of Critical Theory such as Axel Honneth have entered textbooks of sociology or philosophy in the Yugoslav successor states, though the recent 'analytic turn' in local philosophy signalled the expulsion of Critical Theory, even in its 'post-metaphysical', Habermasian incarnation, from academic curricula (Belgrade University is one notorious example). So one might reasonably assume that there are fewer signs today than ever, in the ex-Yugoslav space, of a "noticable theoretical reaction, let alone a productive appropriation" of Critical Theory from Žunjić's introductory remark.

However, I would like to close this brief reflection by suggesting that the present post-Yugoslav constellation, exponentially more 'disoriented' than the 1980s, might finally have ignited some sparks of such appropriation. Belgrade-based philosopher and writer Predrag Krstić has recently formulated one of the most insightful analyses and defenses of the mature Adorno's philosophy in his *Subject against Subjectivity: Adorno and the Philosophy of Subject* (*Subjekt protiv subjektivnosti: Adorno i filozofija subjekta*, 2007). Few analysts of Adorno have demonstrated as masterfully as Krstić, with respect to a widespread criticism, that, for the late Adorno, it is not the negation of the subject but only its "surplus" that can "heal the wounds that the constituted subjectivity as a formation has caused" (Krstić 2007: 11). Another surprisingly fresh and original recent reflection on Critical Theory is the 2010 collection of papers *Kritička teorija društva* (*Critical Theory of Society*), edited by Bosnian phi-

losopher Željko Šarić, which includes contributions by Krstić, Nadežda Čaćinović and Christoph Hubig, alongside Axel Honneth's 'Work and Recognition'. Perhaps it is only the impoverished peripheral-capitalist, post-war condition of the ex-Yugoslav region that allows for a true 'reception' of, or receptivity for, some of Critical Theory's finest accomplishments.

## Literature

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